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PP RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM  
DE RUEHCHI #0193/01 3410137  
ZNY CCCCC  
P 070137Z DEC 07  
FM AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY  
INFO RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI  
RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHMFISS/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CHIANG MAI 000193

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GENEVA FOR RMA

E.O. 12958: 12/7/2017

TAGS: [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: PLIGHT OF "LONG-NECK" KARENNI WOMEN HIGHLIGHTS  
STATELESSNESS

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Classified by Econoff Kevin Rosier for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (U) The detention, fining, and relocation by Thai police of six ethnic Karenni women, also known as "Long-Neck" Karen, for working as entertainers at a resort in Chiang Mai highlight several shortcomings in Thai policy toward Hill Tribe and refugee populations. Had one of the women's village leaders not used media outlets to highlight their predicament - though he may have done so partially for personal gain - the ethnic Karenni women's fate could have been worse. End Summary.

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A PROFITABLE BUT STATELESS PEOPLE  
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¶2. (U) The ethnic Karenni are one of the many stateless groups of northern Thailand (see forthcoming Embassy Bangkok Septel). Most displaced ethnic Karenni live in Mae Hong Son in the three villages of Ban Nai Soi, Ban Huay Sua Thao, and Ban Huay Poo Kaeng. Each of the three villages has a "site manager" or village leader, who is typically a wealthy and influential villager and who often showcases the ethnic Karenni women as a tourist attraction for both their financial benefit and his. Though there is a refugee camp that provides assistance to the ethnic Karenni, most of the women, widely recognized for their "long necks," live outside of the camp. Some ethnic Karenni hold temporary residence cards issued by the Ministry of Interior (MOI), while many remain stateless.

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KIDNAPPED OR SEDUCED?  
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¶3. (C) In a recent case, six Karenni women were detained in Chiang Mai's Chiang Dao district for "illegally" working at a local resort. The women told police that they were "kidnapped by a tour company" that wanted to display them as a tourist attraction. According to Mae Hong Son refugee camp Commander

Wachira Chotirosseeranee, however, the women voluntarily went to Chiang Dao for the jobs after being offered a salary, housing, and board, but later asked family to help them return home when the work was not what they had hoped for. In yet another take on the story, our contact at the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) Mae Hong Son Office alleged that a police officer from the Ban Nam Piang Din Police Station was the one who took the women to Chiang Dao without consent from their villages' site managers.

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"RESCUING" THE LONG-NECK KARENNI FROM CHIANG MAI  
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¶4. (C) According to our NIA contact in Mae Hong Son, when the site manager of Ban Huay Sua Thao, the village where some of the six women resided, learned of their disappearance, he lodged a complaint with the provincial authorities to no avail. He then highlighted the case by using television media outlets to emphasize that the women were taken from their villages. In particular, the site manager used an ethnic Karenni man's statement that he missed his wife and daughter and wanted them home to draw more attention to the story. According to the NIA source, the media spotlight prompted Chiang Mai authorities to take action to "rescue" the women and return them home. According to the Mae Hong Son refugee camp Commander, the women were fined 500 baht (appx. \$14.70) each after the incident.

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COMMENT  
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¶5. (C) Inconsistent facts from various sources leave the question of whether these women were taken by force unanswered. It is possible, however, that Karenni women benefit financially from tourists' attraction to them; so these six women potentially left Mae Hong Son willingly in search of more money than they receive from their village leader. To the dismay of

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many NGOs that call villages where Long-Neck Karenni reside "human zoos," their days of circus-like entertainment are surely not over. Whether taken by force to tourist centers like Chiang Mai or "safe and sound" in their villages, someone will continue to benefit from showcasing the culturally distinct Karenni women.

¶6. (C) Aside from the question of whether they were taken forcibly, this case highlights the plight of stateless groups in Thailand, and the RTG's failure to develop and implement durable solutions for these populations. We will continue to report on this issue, and to encourage the RTG to find long-lasting solutions for Thailand's Hill Tribes and refugees - solutions that respect their dignity, basic human rights, and that limit opportunities for their exploitation by greedy businessmen. Had the site manager of their village not intervened, these women could have been trafficked elsewhere, otherwise exploited, or forced to resettle, either in a refugee camp, or in a village built by Mae Hong Son provincial authorities for them in an area not easily accessible to tourists, making it next to impossible for them to earn a livelihood.

¶7. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Bangkok.  
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